

Kitchen Table Concerns? Republican Congress Made Them Worse

The 2002 elections ended with one party in control of the White House, the Senate and Congress. How are they doing? Perhaps best measure is what they have done on the basic concerns that Americans worry about at their kitchen tables late at night.

Below is a brief Kitchen Table report on the past year. [Read this report online](#), or take a look at the [end-of-year Hardship Index](#).

Wages

Hourly wages continued to fall this year. [\[1\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush White House and the Republican leadership in Congress **would not even allow a vote on a measure to raise the minimum wage** (which has lost 40% of its value since 1968). [\[2\]](#)

Bush also forced through regulations that will **strip 8 million workers of the right to overtime**, despite majority opposition in both Houses of Congress. [\[3\]](#)

Jobs

Over 2 million fewer people are employed since Bush took office, as companies are shipping jobs abroad. [\[4\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and the Republican leadership in Congress **blocked legislation that would provide incentives to keep jobs here in America**, while refusing to repeal tax loopholes that reward companies for moving abroad. [\[5\]](#)

Congress also **went home without extending temporary assistance** to 830,000 jobless people whose unemployment benefits will run out by the end of the year. [\[6\]](#)

Health Care

Health insurance costs are soaring. In the last three years alone, **total spending by seniors on prescription drugs has risen by over 50%**. [\[7\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and slim conservative majorities in Congress passed **a prescription drug bill that prohibits Medicare from negotiating a lower price for seniors**. [\[8\]](#)

Education

Tuitions are soaring, up 14% in one year, and an estimated **4.4 million students will be prevented from attending a four year college** this decade because of rising costs. [\[9\]](#)

Retirement Security

The stock market collapse ravaged retirement savings, and **only one in five private sector workers has a pension at work.** [\[11\]](#)

Health and Safety on the Job

Companies continue to cut corners on health and safety, with over 4.4 million workers injured on the job last year. [\[13\]](#)

Credit Card Debt

Credit card companies continue to impose **obscene interest and penalty charges,** even as Americans are going deeper in debt. [\[15\]](#)

Food Safety

More and more of our food is imported and food borne disease caused **76 million illnesses and 5,000 deaths** last year. [\[17\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and conservatives in Congress **opposed any increase of the maximum Pell Grant award for deserving students,** even while spending \$87 billion on Iraq and Afghanistan. [\[10\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and conservative leadership in Congress pushed "reform" legislation that would actually make it **easier for companies to provide pensions to the top floor while doing nothing for the shop floor.** [\[12\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The administration and conservative majority in Congress **cut the Office of Safety and Health Administration,** leaving a budget that will afford inspection of every company only once every 63 years. [\[14\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and conservatives in Congress **blocked efforts to provide consumers with more information on the terms of credit cards,** and pushed to make it easier for credit card companies to collect against families that are forced into bankruptcy. [\[16\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and Congress **blocked legislation that would have imposed stronger penalties for violating food safety standards,** and legislation that would have made it easier to trace the source of contaminated meat. [\[18\]](#)

Energy

Americans were hit with the **largest energy blackout in American history** last year. [\[19\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and conservative majority in Congress **failed to pass any legislation to modernize the nation's power grid.** [\[20\]](#)

Safe Water

7 million Americans became sick from contaminated tap water last year. [\[21\]](#)

Meanwhile, back in Washington...

The Bush administration and conservative majority in Congress pushed through top-end tax breaks while **blocking legislation to help communities comply with drinking water standards.** [\[22\]](#)

The president says his plan is working, that the economy is in recovery. But for Americans worrying at their kitchen tables at night, **things are getting worse, not better.** And in area after area, this White House and the conservative majority in Congress are part of the problem, not part of the solution.